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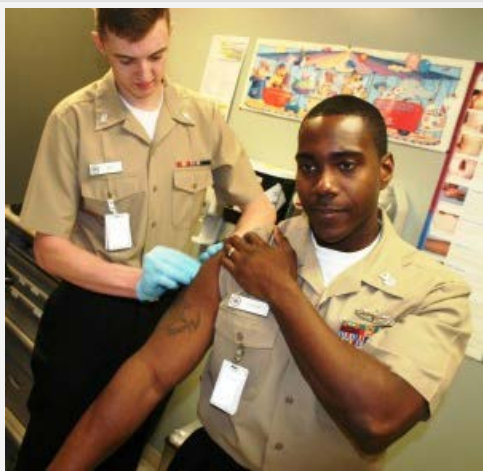


NAVY MEDICINE IN FOCUS

Naval Hospital Bremerton caring and concern helping with the Cold and Flu Season

BY VJOHNSON – JANUARY 10, 2014

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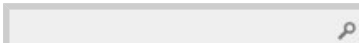
A little dab will do you...Hospitalman Justin Ray of NHB's Family Medicine provides vaccination support to Culinary Specialist 1st Class James Hangan in the Immunization Clinic, which has seen a steady flow of requests for seasonal influenza vaccinations since the start of the New Year (Photo by Douglas H Stutz).

By Douglas H Stutz, Naval Hospital Bremerton Public Affairs

The arrival of the New Year has not only brought football playoff fever to the greater Pacific Northwest. It's also heralded the arrival of the cold and flu season.

Naval Hospital Bremerton is geared up to provide influenza vaccinations to those in need at the main hospital Immunization Clinic and at the Branch Health Clinics.

“There have been six deaths caused by influenza reported in the state of Washington this season so far. They have been in middle to older aged persons who have had medical conditions that made them more likely to suffer severe influenza. There have also been reports of severe respiratory illness in young and middle-aged adults caused by influenza H1N1. Since this is the strain that caused an unexpected high rate of serious illness in children and young adults during



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- [A LOOK BACK](#)
- [FEATURES](#)
- [I AM NAVY MEDICINE](#)
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the 2009 pandemic, it is even more important to emphasize that all age groups should be protected by receiving the influenza vaccination, whether young and healthy or older with chronic illness,” said Capt. Mark Malakooti, NHB Population Health head.

Navy Medicine’s seasonal influenza vaccine immunization program was held in October 2013 with a week-long Influenza Vaccination Clinic, specifically designed for Sailors and Marines, mission-essential healthcare personnel, and eligible beneficiaries. Many have already gotten their flu shot and for those who missed that opportunity, they can visit NHB’s Immunization Clinic at the main hospital and Branch Health Clinics that are offering both injectable and, for healthy patients between 2 years and 49 years of age, intranasal flu vaccine (while supplies last).

“For those who have not yet been immunized, the influenza vaccine is available at the Immunization Clinic at the hospital and the branch clinics, no appointment required,” Malakooti said, adding that the current influenza vaccine includes protection against the H1N1 strain that is the most common flu virus circulating this season.

“While no vaccine is 100 percent effective, the current flu vaccine will greatly decrease the chances of influenza infection, and if someone does still become infected, they are less likely to have severe symptoms,” stated Malakooti.

According to Malakooti, anyone can become infected by this H1N1 strain of influenza, but people who are vaccinated are much less likely to become infected, and even less likely to become seriously ill. Due to the six fatalities in the state, H1N1 flu has been in the news of late. State Health Department data shows three confirmed flu deaths as of mid-December, with another two deaths during the first week of January, and one more confirmed Sat., Jan 4, in Grant County.

“Influenza is currently widespread in Washington state, and the numbers continue to increase as we move towards the peak of the flu season. It is definitely still worthwhile to get immunized with the current influenza vaccine,” stressed Malakooti.

Malakooti notes that the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommend that everyone, even those as young as six months, should get the influenza vaccine each year. It is especially important for pregnant women and people with chronic diseases like asthma and diabetes, and those that have weakened immune systems.

Additionally, Dr. Dan Frederick, NHB Population Health and Forecasting expert, points out that the value of vaccinating the pregnant population is multiplied because of the cocooning protection to the newborn when mom (and other close household contacts) are vaccinated. Just as it is important for military personnel who live and work in close quarters to receive the vaccine, it is also highly recommended for school-aged children, as they come into close contact with each other and can easily spread the influenza virus.

For those who have already received their immunization, they do not need to receive it again – only children who have never received a flu vaccine because they require a two-shot series the first year they get vaccinated.

For those with flu-like symptoms such fever, sore throat, body aches and pain, etc., Malakooti that they should stay home and rest to recover quicker and prevent spreading the infection. Drink plenty of non-alcoholic/non-caffeinated fluids, cover coughs/sneezes, and wash hands frequently. “And get their immunization,” he added.

The H1N1 flu is a relatively new influenza virus, first detected in the US in April 2009, as well

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as many other countries around the world.

“Our experience in the past with H1N1 flu reinforced the need to protect ourselves,” said Tom Shirk, NHB Infection Control coordinator, who also recommends for everyone to continue proper personal hygiene at all times. “It’s the little things that add up to the whole, such as hand washing, covering a cough, and staying home if ill. We now know it’s important and it’s up to us to not only set the example, but ensure our family and friends do the same.”

Immunization remains the primary method of reducing seasonal influenza illness and its complications. The seasonal influenza vaccine not only helps protect vaccinated individuals, but also helps protect entire communities by preventing and reducing the spread of the disease. Influenza is not the common cold. Influenza can be a severe to life-threatening disease and getting an annual influenza vaccine immunization (either the traditional shot in the arm or the newer nasal spray vaccine) protects many people from getting the disease or becoming severely ill.

There are also multiple steps, attests Shirk, that can be done daily to mitigate the potential spread of the flu. “Besides hand washing with soap and water, we encourage everyone to use our alcohol-based hand sanitizers,” commented Shirk. “They are phenomenally effective in eliminating the transfer of a virus. Anyone entering and leaving, or waiting by the elevators can use them.”

Influenza is thought to spread mainly from people touching something with influenza viruses on it and then touching their mouth or nose. One of the challenging aspects of flu is that someone who becomes infected can infect others one day before they have symptoms and up to five days after becoming sick. Influenza usually causes mild to severe illness, and uncommonly can lead to death. Symptoms of influenza include fever, headache, extreme tiredness, dry cough, sore throat, chills, runny or stuffy nose and muscle aches. Stomach symptoms such as nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea also can occur but are more common in children than adults. Traditionally, seasonal flu impacts the elderly and the young.

“I encourage parents to get a thermometer for home-use if they don’t have one already. If a family member is running a fever of 100.4 or greater has a cough and/or sore throat then it is very possible that they have influenza,” noted Shirk. “If anyone is concerned that their symptoms are not consistent with a mild case of the flu, they should contact their medical provider and/or seek medical attention. For those with mild symptoms recovering at home with over the counter medications for symptom relief is usually all that is needed.”

According to the CDC, every year in the United States, more than 200,000 people are hospitalized from influenza complications and about 36,000 people die from influenza-related causes. General information of seasonal influenza can be found at <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/>.

What can people do to protect themselves against the flu virus?

Naval Hospital Bremerton follows CDC recommendations to:

- • Avoid close contact with people who are sick, when you are sick, keep your distance from others to protect them from also getting sick.
- • If possible, stay home from work, school and errands when you are sick. You will help prevent others from catching your illness.
- • Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. It may prevent those around you from getting sick.
- • Washing your hands often will help protect you from germs.
- • Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs are often spread when a person touches something that is contaminated with germs and then touches his/her eyes, nose or mouth.

Different Influenza Types

Seasonal flu is a respiratory illness that can be transmitted person to person. Most people have some immunity, and a vaccine is available.

Pandemic flu is virulent human flu that causes a global outbreak, or pandemic, of serious illness. Because there is little natural immunity, the disease can spread easily from person to person.

Avian Flu is caused by influenza viruses that occur naturally among wild birds. Low pathogenic avian flu is common in birds and causes few problems. Highly pathogenic H5N1 is deadly to domestic fowl, can be transmitted from birds to humans, and is deadly to humans. There is virtually no human immunity and human vaccine availability is very limited.

Bird Flu is commonly used to refer to avian flu. Bird flu viruses infect birds, including chickens, other poultry and wild birds such as ducks.



About vjohnson